



## Gulf (Regional Issues)

19 May 2011

### Adoption of the Kuwait Declaration on Gender Equality

**Within the framework of the Forum for the Future, the first civil society workshop was held in Kuwait, on 4-5 May 2011, on the theme of Gender Equality. Civil society organizations from the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA), participating in the workshop, adopted the following declaration:**

**Considering** the persistence of discrimination and violence against women and emphasizing the fact that gender inequality constitutes a major obstacle to human development;

**Considering** that certain laws that remain in force in countries of the region include provisions that grossly discriminate against women;

**Considering** that the level of representation of women in public and political life remains low; **Considering** that equal participation of women and men is an essential element of democracy of peoples and societies;

**Considering** the importance of protecting marginalized groups within societies, including workers, migrants, refugees and victims of human-trafficking, through the adoption of specific procedures and measures;

**Considering** that although most countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), many international treaties remain unimplemented in national laws and policies;

**Considering** that reservations entered to essential articles of CEDAW contradict the very principles of non-discrimination and gender equality;

**Considering** that the winds of democratic change which have strongly swept the Arab world now lead to a qualitative change in the work of the Forum for the Future, in order to keep up with and satisfy the ambitions and aspirations of the people.

**Considering** with concern the increase in attempts to exclude and discriminate against women, as well as the development of violations of women's rights by certain extremist groups;

**Considering** that women, whatever their beliefs, have taken part, side-by-side with men, in the revolutions and movements for change and the construction of democratic societies based on freedom, equality and justice;

**Recalling** that human rights are indivisible and that women's rights are human rights;

**Reaffirming** that the civil, political, social, economical and cultural rights of women must be guaranteed, in accordance with international treaties<sup>1</sup>, in the public and private spheres, and that equal representation of men and women must be respected in international meetings and negotiations;

**Convinced** that human development and democracy shall only be achieved through the elimination of all difficulties and obstacles that prevent women's full enjoyment of their human rights, and through the protection of their rights, which is first and foremost a question of political will;

The civil society organizations which participated in the workshop agree the following recommendations and call upon the Governments of the region to implement them effectively:

#### **Laws and policies:**

1. To include provisions on equality between women and men within the constitutions of countries of the region, in respect of all rights, all civil liberties and all policies establishing equal citizenship between men and women, in particular by reaffirming the rights to freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to participate in public affairs.

2. To revise national laws, within the next 2 years, so that they are in conformity with international conventions, in particular CEDAW, taking into consideration recommendations of civil society and thus to amend laws in force and to issue new laws in order to prevent discrimination and violence against women and human trafficking, and in particular:

- To expressly include the prohibition on discrimination as defined in CEDAW and to sanction such discrimination;
- To expressly recognise the responsibility of States in the protection of women from discrimination, whether by governmental or non-governmental institutions;
- To amend personal status laws and codes in order to create commitments and obligations that guarantee the participation of women in public and political life.

3. To adopt laws that guarantee fundamental freedoms and contribute to fighting corruption, including laws on freedom of information.

4. To guarantee freedom of association for political parties, as well as trade unions and civil society organizations.

5. To establish social, economic and educational policies that provide for the creation of new jobs for women and improve their social, economic and educational situations, in particular for women in rural areas.

#### **Measures and Proceedings**

To adopt effective measures to guarantee women's full participation in building their societies, by:

1. Withdrawing the reservations to CEDAW and ratifying its Optional Protocol

2. Taking temporary special measures to guarantee women's participation (CEDAW article 4 and Recommendations 20 and 25) in order to overcome their historical exclusion from public and political life, in the form of quotas greater than 30% at all levels of decision-making (legislative, executive, judicial and administrative).

### **Establishment of Forum for the Future follow up mechanisms**

1. The states co-chairing the Forum for Future should undertake to publish a report on progress achieved in the implementation of recommendations and present such report at the following session of the Forum for the Future.

2. Civil Society Organizations participating in the Forum for the Future, should have the opportunity to choose freely the location, themes and lists of participants of the workshops.

3. A permanent Secretariat of the Forum for the Future should be established in order to preserve the work of the Forum, coordinate between various parties involved in the Forum and follow up on the implementation of recommendations, ensuring adequate participation of women's rights organisations.

4. The creation of the Gender Institute, which was agreed upon by states during the previous ministerial meetings of the Forum for the Future, should be accelerated and its funding, independence and sustainability guaranteed, through the participation of civil society in the management of the Institute.

5. The Gender Institute's mandate must be coherent with existing governmental and non-governmental mechanisms, particularly with similar centers operating in the field of gender equality in the Arab and Mediterranean region, especially with the Women's Foundation for the Mediterranean.

6. A Center on Diversity should be established in order to spread tolerance and diversity, which promotes peace and harmony among people. During their official meeting in Kuwait, states should clarify their responsibility in conducting a study on the feasibility of such a body and time frame, its governing statutes and strategic outline, including vision, mission, objectives, governing values and sources of funding.

7. Financial support should be maintained to the Foundation for the Future, the only outcome of the Future Forum process which plays a major role in supporting the projects of civil society organizations, especially in light of the current developments and demands for democratic change in the region.

### **Adopted in Kuwait, 5 May 2011**

<http://www.fidh.org/Adoption-of-the-Kuwait-Declaration-on-Gender>